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# The Federation Grows

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## The Federation Grows

The Iowa Federation of Women's Clubs was well established as it faced the twentieth century. Its members could not know what that century would require of them, but they could be sure that it would be very different from the fading Victorian era. Transportation, industry, and science would make a vast difference in life, but they could not foresee that this would be the test-tube age when the basic assumptions in all areas of human affairs would be questioned and re-thought. Nor could they know that two world wars would be fought, a paralyzing economic depression would envelop the world, and two great political ideologies — Democracy and Communism — would be locked in a death struggle before the century would reach its halfway mark. Neither could they know that in all this the United States would be the chief protagonist. What they did know was that whatever befell, women would carry their share of the load and they believed the Federation would help them.

The pioneer groups which preceded the women's clubs early expressed a longing for "better things" and so in small towns a few women would join their interests and their talents to become a



club — “an organized group of women in the community which can be depended on to promote movements looking toward the betterment of life.” Each club, because it was an entity, followed its own procedure. And whether its program was that “better thing,” a study of Shakespeare and Browning or a perennial quilting bee, its members had learned the value of joining forces — of federating. But they also had much else to learn. The twin purpose of culture and service could be transferred to the larger group with confidence in the advantages to be gained. The story of the Federation is the story of the individual clubs. Whether small or large, rural or urban, junior or senior, each club is individual and has a unique contribution to make, but all have much in common. Perhaps the quality which more than anything else gives them power is their togetherness.

During the earlier years when the membership of the Federation expanded, the growing influence of the organization was manifest. When Mrs. J. W. Richards of Waterloo was elected to the presidency at the 1909 convention in Davenport, the news was rated as the “lead” story in the May 22 Des Moines *Register and Leader*, ahead of the important Senate tariff debates then occupying the nation’s attention. At this same convention Judge H. E. Deemer of Red Oak told club members their legislative program would be aided by the adoption of woman suffrage. Judge



Deemer also praised the Federation's work on behalf of juvenile courts and child labor legislation.

Sometimes, as in war, a democratic group has difficulty in harnessing the potential of energy available; so it is with the Federation. Its plan was to have a democratic organization which could develop and grow as necessary. Its officers came from the clubs all over the state. It can be said of the presidents — and they are representative of the other officers — that they were and are women of the upper middle class, keenly intelligent, with better than average formal education. All are deeply religious, have winning personalities, are friendly, kindly, and of immense good will. Almost all are mothers. Their husbands are for the most part either business or professional men. Skilled in leadership, these women serve the Federation in many capacities on their way to the top offices; after their terms they continue to serve wherever needed. The presidents have also been liaison workers between the Iowa Federation and the General Federation. Four served as national General Federation Officers: Mrs. G. F. Van Vechten and Mrs. B. B. Clark as treasurer, Mrs. H. C. Taylor as recording secretary, and most recently Mrs. H. C. Houghton as president.

Membership in the Federation mounted rapidly. There were 35 clubs in 1893; in ten years, 284; in twenty years, 450; in thirty years, well over 800; in 1933 the peak was reached when 931 clubs



were federated with a membership of over 40,000 women. In 1937 Iowa won first place in the G. F. W. C. membership contest.

As the Federation grew in numbers it was seen that the work could be better organized if the state were divided into districts. In 1905 it followed the Iowa Bankers Association plan of 16 districts, changing in 1909 to the 11 congressional districts, and in 1941 to the present eight. Finding these groups still too large, it carried the division down into counties in 1919. Clubs still had direct contact with the state organization, but found it helpful to meet in these smaller groups at the county meetings in the spring and the district meetings in the fall. District directors were made voting members of the Board in 1909, and the first vice-president was made their chairman at the same time. The county chairmen were placed under the second vice-president in 1923.

Organized in Des Moines, the Federation seemed logically to center there. After a previous recommendation to that effect, the I. F. W. C. headquarters was established there in 1925, being housed at the Hotel Fort Des Moines with a headquarters secretary in charge.

The work of the Federation was carried on by officers and committees without remuneration, but some money was essential. The original dues of \$2.00 per club for a biennium — of which 25 cents was sent to the G. F. W. C. — was changed



to 10 cents per member in 1909. The next raise was to 35 cents in 1921 and finally to \$1.00 in 1951. The dues pay for the rent of the headquarters, the salary of the headquarters secretary, the publication of the *Clubwoman* and *Blue Book*, the biennial convention, and some expense for the president, other officers, districts, departments, and committees. The Iowa Federation was the first to have universal membership in the G. F. W. C., and when dues were raised to 35 cents per member, 10 cents of that was sent to the General Federation, thus initiating the Iowa plan which other states have since followed. Of the present \$1.00 dues, 25 cents is sent to the G. F. W. C. Mrs. Robert J. Johnston of Humboldt has been the financial wizard of the Federation, serving as treasurer, chairman of the finance committee, and financial adviser.

The Federation has always believed that one of the best means of carrying on the work is through a periodical publication. The first such paper, *The New Cycle*, was sent to club presidents. In 1903 the *Mail and Times* became the official I. F. W. C. organ. In 1915 an eight-page paper, *The Iowa Federation Bulletin*, was published and sent to club presidents. In 1919 it became *The Iowa Federation News* and was sent to every member. At that time the periodical was put on a new financial basis; two years later it was partly financed by advertising. In 1927 it



became the *Iowa Clubwoman*, was published five times yearly, and had from twenty to twenty-four pages. Mrs. F. W. Weitz was appointed editor in 1919, continuing in that capacity until she was called to the editorship of the G. F. W. C. *Clubwoman* in 1944. Mrs. Eugene Cutler, who had served on the magazine staff for many years, was the logical successor to Mrs. Weitz. These two women have known the Federation as perhaps no others have, for across their desks have flowed the records of what the Federation is and does. They have been sensitive to meanings behind those records and have expressed that understanding with tact and wisdom.

In the 1897-1899 biennium the first I. F. W. C. yearbook was sold to members for 5 cents a copy. As the Federation grew the *Blue Book* kept pace, recording leadership, membership, work, and convention reports; copies were sent to all officers, committees, and club presidents. The corresponding secretary was charged with collecting the material, arranging for its publication, and mailing it.

As the Federation developed, it discovered many ways to improve life. The impact of major historical events opened new service opportunities which developed into great achievements under the guidance of carefully chosen committees. In time committees of allied interests were assembled as divisions of departments, and eventually each department, division, and committee had full



district representation, thus facilitating the dissemination of ideas and work to all member clubs.

Club interest in literature has continued through the years, though programs are not now confined to a study of the classics. An Iowa woman, on her way home from the East on a train, was delighted when her seatmate exclaimed as they crossed the Mississippi, "Iowa! I have always heard that that is where the women read next year's books though they may wear last year's hats." Although literature was the first cultural interest, it had no special committee until 1909, and then it was linked with library extension. Later becoming a division in the fine arts department, literature has planned adult reading courses, set up standards for book reviews, and encouraged members and youth to attempt creative writing.

This primary interest in literature caused the appointment of the library committee in 1895. Books, essential to the "better life," must be made available to everyone. Traveling libraries were needed for Iowa's rural population. Clubs needed libraries for their programs. And if there was no other way, and you were determined to have a library, you could kill, dress, and fry forty chickens for a progressive benefit dinner as one club member did. The library committee supported the establishment of the State Library Commission and continued to encourage constructive library legis-



lation. The number of free libraries climbed from 4 in 1895 to 96 by 1907. The committee conducted a campaign to establish county libraries in every county in the state. During both World War I and World War II it collected thousands of books which were sent to cantonments at home and to rest areas abroad. After the wars the library committee sponsored memorial shelves in libraries to honor the war dead.

Careful program planning must be done if members are to retain interest in their club activities. The work of the reciprocity committee, appointed in 1895, was incorporated in 1901 into the club program committee. There was much discussion among clubs as to whether programs should be "encyclopedic, original or borrowed." An exchange program committee starting in 1929 selected and sent programs in to headquarters to be available for all to use. Mrs. H. A. Little has served the Federation as program consultant for years and in 1937 prepared a useful *Program Booklet*. Mrs. Pearl Bennett Broxam did a great deal to help clubs build effective programs. Her very pointed remarks on "messalaneous" programs usually brought results. Twice she served as program chairman of state biennial conventions.

"Village Improvement" began as a housewifely dislike for the unsightliness of tin can and trash heaps, but quickly encompassed all sanitation, beautification, and protection for a town or city.



It became the community service committee in 1935. This is a field in which each club can make itself felt in its own community.

Legislation is one of the Federation's best working tools. Long before they had the right to vote, clubwomen in Iowa were working to secure passage of laws which affected the welfare of children, the home, and the community. The legislation committee, first appointed in 1895, receives recommendations from other committees, marshals arguments, and presents them to the legislature. Where it will help, all clubs are informed and asked to study the matter and then write their opinions to senators and representatives from their own districts. One Iowa Federation president states in her biennial report: "It may be coincidence, or it may mean much, but no bill the Federation endorsed lost and no bill it opposed passed during this biennium."

Education has been at the top of the list of "better things" for which the Federation has worked ever since 1899, when an education committee was appointed and instructed to petition for a compulsory education law at once. It did so and helped secure the passage of the law. Vocational and ethical training, adult education, and the establishment of kindergartens were advocated. During the first World War thousands of programs teaching patriotism and loyalty were prepared by the I. F. W. C. and released by the



State Superintendent of Public Instruction. The Federation worked with the State Teachers Association to improve schools, teacher training, and pay, and endorsed a statewide system of teacher retirement and annuities. During the depression it opposed the lowering of teachers' salaries, and the removal of vocational training and art from the curriculum. The School Code Revision was supported. In 1941 the president was first invited to take part in the Council for Better Education. State Superintendents Agnes Samuelson and Jessie M. Parker have served actively as advisers to the Federation department of education.

The committee on education of the deaf and blind became a part of the education department in 1921. Its chairman was made a member of the State Commission for the Blind in 1923. Working together, the I. F. W. C. and the State Commission have accomplished much to make life better for these handicapped people.

While the Federation has never permitted sectarian tests for membership, nevertheless religion played a most important part in club life. It was not until 1931 that a division of religious education was placed in the education department. Later it was made a separate committee of religious emphasis. Its field has been much broader under this title, and its influence is felt in all areas of club life.

In 1903 the State Historical Society of Iowa ac-



quired a complete file of Federation publications. In 1915 the governor issued a Greater Iowa Day Proclamation at the request of the Federation. By 1923 the I. F. W. C. was so history-minded that a committee on Iowa history and landmarks was created and placed in the education department. Through this committee the Federation inaugurated an essay contest in local community history for high school pupils in Iowa, an enterprise in which the State Historical Society of Iowa offered not only its hearty cooperation but \$1,000 in prize money. In succeeding years the Federation also cooperated with the Society in observing Iowa History Week, in 1932 working on the program, "Black Hawk and the Treaty of 1832," and in 1933 on "The White Tide Breaks." Both years a copy of *THE PALIMPSEST* was sent to each club in the Federation.

Art was the second of the fine arts to claim attention. Early in the new century the art committee, appointed in 1897, secured the loan of a fine collection of paintings for exhibit in Iowa. It sponsored a poster contest in the public schools on the fifth Liberty Loan drive and offered the prizes to winners. Through the work of this committee the Iowa Federation joined with the General Federation in sponsoring plans for a national art gallery.

An art critic was secured to give lectures at all district meetings in 1924-1926. Throughout the



years this committee has endeavored to make Iowa art-conscious and has encouraged Iowa artists by holding exhibits of self-portraits and other paintings by Iowans at biennial conventions. Mrs. Louis Pelzer of Iowa City and Mrs. Louis Anderson of Fort Dodge are two of those who have ably carried on the work in art begun by Mrs. Anna B. Howe of Marshalltown.

The Federation's emphasis on the American home first became evident with the appointment of the committee of household economics in 1899. A mother's child study committee was set up in 1903. In 1905 study of the Iowa Pure Food Law was recommended; the law was passed in 1907. During the first World War the committee secured 102 home demonstration agents in Iowa.

In 1926 the I. F. W. C. and G. F. W. C. co-operated in bringing the first American Homes National Congress to Des Moines. The American home department advocated uniform marriage and divorce laws. The first family relations conference was held in Ames in 1935, where all problems of the home were considered. Home finance, insurance, banking, and investment have all been given a place in the work of this department. In 1939 the G. F. W. C. adopted the Iowa slogan of "Making Home a Hobby."

The G. F. W. C. advocated conservation work in Iowa by requesting that a forestry committee be appointed in 1901, but in 1909 the I. F. W. C.



is said to have preceded all other states and the G. F. W. C. in creating a conservation committee. Again, in 1915, it was first to appoint a committee on preservation of natural scenery. This helped in creating sentiment for acquiring state parks. The conservation department supported a State Conservation Board, and urged the employment of a park and regional planning engineer to work out a 25-year program for Iowa. It supported the measure against pollution of rivers and streams, and pledged cooperation with J. N. "Ding" Darling, Chief of the United States Biological Survey in the Wild Life Conservation program. It urged a \$300,000 appropriation for an Iowa Conservation Commission.

The woman always associated with the outstanding conservation work in Iowa is Mrs. Francis E. Whitley. She was dedicated to making Iowa conservation-conscious and to that end would rise in any meeting to ask if she "might say a few words on conservation." Nationally recognized for her work, she was called to speak before congressional hearings on conservation. In Iowa a newly planted forest near Lake Aquabi was named in her honor, and today Federation members are proud to note the bronze name plate and enjoy the beauty of the trees.

A good roads committee was created under conservation, and here another former I. F. W. C. president, Mrs. H. C. Taylor of Bloomfield, per-



## THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS



1919-1921 — (*front L to R*): Mrs. J. W. Cory, Mrs. H. W. Spaulding, Mrs. F. S. Barberry — (*back*): Mrs. E. F. Armstrong, Mrs. Galen Tilden, Mrs. J. F. Lake, and Mrs. E. Whitley.



1951-1953 — (*L to R*): Miss Sara Nott, Mrs. E. E. Taylor, Mrs. Harold Nissen, Mrs. Martin Van Oosterhout, Mrs. Emil Hesselschwerdt, and Mrs. Clark Mechem.



# THIRTY PRESIDENTS OF THE IOWA



Mrs. J. G. Berryhill  
Des Moines  
1893-95



Mrs. H. J. Howe  
Marshalltown  
1895-97



Mrs. G. F. Van Vechten  
Cedar Rapids  
1897-99



Mrs. M. V. D.  
Hutchinson  
Ottumwa  
1899-01



Mrs. W. H. Bail  
Des Moines  
1901-03



Mrs. T. J. Fletcher  
Marshalltown  
1903-05



Mrs. J. J. Seerley  
Burlington  
1905-07



Mrs. J. A. Nash  
Audubon  
1907-09



Mrs. J. W. Richards  
Waterloo  
1909-11



Mrs. H. A. Miller  
Des Moines  
1911-13



Mrs. B. B. Clark  
Red Oak  
1913-15



Mrs. F. E. Whitley  
Webster City  
1915-17



Mrs. J. W. Watzek  
Davenport  
1917-19



Mrs. H. W. Spaulding  
Grinnell  
1919-21



Mrs. E. F. Armstrong  
Fort Dodge  
1921-23



FEDERATION OF WOMEN'S CLUBS — 1893-1953



Mrs. H. C. Taylor  
Bloomfield  
1923-25



Mrs. J. F. Lake  
Shenandoah  
1925-27



Mrs. Wm. Milchrist  
Sioux City  
1927-29



Mrs. Galen Tilden  
Ames  
1929-31



Mrs. Wm.  
Larrabee, Jr.  
Clermont  
1931-33



Mrs. Eugene Henely  
Grinnell  
1933-35



Mrs. H. C. Houghton  
Red Oak  
1935-37



Mrs. Eugene Cutler  
Des Moines  
1937-39



Mrs. Carl W. Reed  
Cresco  
1939-41



Mrs. David  
Lennox, Jr.  
Marshalltown  
1941-43



Mrs. R. B. Pike  
Sioux City  
1943-45



Mrs. J. H. Hager  
Waukon  
1945-47



Mrs. A. D. Wiese  
Manning  
1947-49



Mrs. F. C. Lovrien  
Spencer  
1949-51



Mrs. Martin  
Van Oosterhout  
Orange City  
1951-53





Three recipients of IFWC Scholarships discuss their good fortune: (L to R) Miss Margaret Hammes, Emmetsburg; Miss Rina Villevende, Panama; and Miss Jean Langford, Jefferson.



Mrs. Hiram C. Houghton and Mrs. Martin Van Oosterhout were among the ladies briefed by Embassy officials in Buenos Aires during GFWC Good Will Tour of South America.



formed great service. She toured the state, speaking for good roads wherever people would hear her, and was so persuasive that Iowa probably came out of the mud much sooner because of her.

A music committee, appointed in 1905, has worked to raise the standard of music appreciation through the years. It has encouraged the organization of vocal and instrumental groups all over the state, and has made possible an all-state chorus which sings at biennial conventions. A contest for an Iowa Federation song resulted in the song, "We Build." Thousands of records and phonographs were sent to cantonments and hospitals in 1917. A Star-Light Sing sponsored in a southwestern county brought together a thousand people to sing the heartwarming songs everyone knows. Music, being the universal language, is one of the best of the "better things" women seek and appreciate.

Clubwomen are concerned not only for the welfare of their own, but also for that of all humans. It is true that they are apt to short-circuit an abstract argument by asking, "You mean like Jimmy Jones?" In Iowa they first attacked child labor, helping to secure the passage of an adequate law. They believed that there should be a research laboratory for studying the needs of children, and fully supported legislation which brought about the establishment in 1917 of the Iowa Child Welfare Research Station at the State University.



Working with other groups they succeeded in securing the appointment of an Iowa Child Welfare Commission. Children's clinics were held, and a campaign was carried on for diphtheria inoculation and compulsory smallpox vaccination of school children.

The Federation cooperated in the organization of the Iowa State Council of Parent Education, worked for amendments to adoption laws, and for the Children's Code which came into existence in 1922. The needs of dependent and crippled children were studied and a survey made in 1929. The American Medical Association appointed a member of the health committee to serve as chairman of their committee of women's and children's welfare. The Federation president, on invitation of President Herbert Hoover, attended the White House Conference on Child Health and Protection. The I. F. W. C. is also represented on the Iowa Commission for Children and Youth.

The industrial committee, appointed in 1903, later became the industrial and child labor committee. The social service committee worked to secure a trained worker in each county. The civil service committee surveyed conditions in state institutions in 1909. Work for a Vital Statistics Bill began in 1915. Full cooperation with the cancer control program and the tuberculosis X-ray project were given. In 1919 a psychopathic ward in the University Hospital was endorsed.



The division of law observance made a survey of the criminal courts in 1925. Later, crime prevention was emphasized, and abuses of the pardon and parole system were denounced, while assistance was given in a survey made by the National Probation Association. The Federation opposed all legalized sale of alcoholic beverages, demanded changes in the liquor laws, and aided in the enforcement of the law requiring the teaching of the effects of alcohol and narcotics in the public schools. The safety committee effectively promoted driver training in the schools, securing the course in many places. It also promoted safety in the home by making available copies of the safety rules.

The time when a parlor play was first given for a club program is not known, but a safe conjecture is that it would be very close to the first meetings. The drama division of the fine arts department has stressed appreciation of great drama, presentation of one-act plays, and the use of drama in programs. Again Mrs. H. C. Taylor and Mrs. Broxam must be given credit. Mrs. Taylor's attic theater was used to develop one-act plays, and Mrs. Broxam, drama teacher and radio program director, served the Federation as chairman of drama and chairman of fine arts.

Poetry was the last fine arts division to be named and was really taken from the literature division. It has concerned itself particularly with



the writing of poetry, and has published two books of verse written by clubwomen. The I. F. W. C. first named a poet laureate in 1931 when that title was given to Mrs. Lewis Worthington Smith.

The Iowa Federation, which was not too receptive to the idea of woman suffrage in 1893, found it had changed its mind by 1911 when it formulated a resolution relative to a ballot box "free to all regardless of sex." Two years later Iowa was the first Federation to adopt — almost unanimously — a resolution favoring equal suffrage. Then they worked to educate women for the ballot, which right was granted in 1920.

An American citizenship department was created in 1922, which helped those who were preparing to become citizens whether they were of foreign birth or minors. Political science, economic problems, and Americanization — subjects of deep interest to new voters — were placed in care of committees. Mrs. Max Mayer of Des Moines was the Iowa Federation's best informed, most eloquent worker in this field of public affairs and gave her talents freely as leader and speaker.

With the close of the first World War interest in international relations rose sharply. First as a division and then as a department, this work has loomed large on the Federation program. Under this department the I. F. W. C. cooperated in the first Conference on the Cause and Cure of War. It succeeded in securing 42,000 names on the



petition endorsing the World Court, worked for international reduction of armaments, and supported the G. F. W. C. action on the sanctity of treaty obligations. In 1945 it sent a message to the Secretary of State requesting that women be permitted to sit in on peace plans. Three women sat as consultants at the San Francisco conference which launched the United Nations. Mrs. Ralph Finkbine of Atlantic, as chairman of the department of international relations, has of recent years kept the Federation informed and active in this field. Her work has been recognized nationally.

It was noted in 1899 that the I. F. W. C. had the "club of youngest members" in the General Federation, but it was not until 1919 that a Junior Club became federated. Two years later a Junior Clubs committee was appointed, which did much to encourage Junior groups. In 1935 the work was given department status, and the first Junior Council was held in Des Moines. Three state conferences were held in the next four years, and Iowa Juniors were given recognition at G. F. W. C. conventions. The peak of Junior membership was reached in 1938 with 98 clubs having 2,412 members. Much of the credit for building Junior club work in Iowa is due to Miss Lulu Green of Des Moines, who was chairman of the Junior department or adviser for a number of years, and also to Miss Edith McBeth of Des Moines, who began as a Junior herself.



The club institute committee grew out of the 1913 committee of parliamentary reference. This work on all phases of club procedure has been a part of district and county meetings. In 1935 an All-State Club Institute was held in Iowa City.

A press committee, appointed in 1909 to take charge of Federation publicity, was later made the press and publicity department. It has been said that not a single I. F. W. C. project would have been possible without the expert publicity prepared by Miss Blanche Wingate of Des Moines. She also taught club "reporters" how to present their information in newsworthy fashion while she served as chairman or adviser of this department.

In 1919, at the request of the Iowa Department of Agriculture, the I. F. W. C. appointed a State Fair committee whose work has been to prepare the programs which are presented in the Women's and Children's Building during Fair Week.

As the Iowa Federation of Women's Clubs grew and developed, it showed clearly that it had a genius for initiating new work and a genius for cooperation. Through discussions, lectures, and publications it has been able to reach conclusions and spread information. By working, giving, and voting it has accomplished its ends. It has demonstrated beyond a doubt that women can and do carry their share of the load.

HAZEL P. BUFFUM